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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TALLINN 000013

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR S/SRAP BLANC  
STATE FOR SCA/A GRAMAGLIA AND COBERLY  
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/26

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SUBJECT: ESTONIA'S 18-MONTH STRATEGY FOR AFGHANISTAN

REF: STATE 6355

CLASSIFIED BY: HILTONJA, Pol/Mil, DoS, Embassy Tallinn; REASON:  
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Over the next 18 months, Estonia intends to contribute to success in Afghanistan by maintaining its defense forces in the south, increasing its civilian development resources in both Kabul and Helmand, and participating in diplomatic solutions together with the United States. In addition to maximizing the number of combat troops on the ground in Afghanistan, Estonia is making good on its multi-year commitment to spend close to USD two million on assistance programs in Afghanistan by 2011. The Estonian Parliament is finalizing an IT-based voting assistance project for the Afghan Parliament that it hopes to co-finance with USAID. To date, domestic support for the Afghanistan mission remains solid. The Foreign Minister will attend the London Conference on January 28. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Ever since President Obama's December 2 speech unveiling the USG Afghanistan strategy for 2010-2011, Estonia has been taking a close look at its own "Three Ds" in an effort to keep Estonian priorities aligned with U.S. goals. In the run-up to the Jan 28 London Conference on Afghanistan, Emboffs met with several key Afghanistan experts who unanimously confirmed Estonia's desire to stay engaged and be effective in Afghanistan.

DEFENSE: CAVEAT-FREE DEPLOYMENTS TO SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN WILL  
CONTINUE

¶3. (C) In 2009 Estonia was the largest per capita NATO contributor to ISAF (excepting the U.S.). 2010 will see a decrease in Estonian troop numbers, as Estonia must fulfill its pledge of troops for the NATO Response Force. That being said, the Defense Minister stated Jan 5 that Estonia will keep its Afghanistan contribution at the maximum allowed levels. (Estonia has a parliamentary mandate approving an upper limit of 170 troops for Afghanistan.) In addition to the company-sized deployment to Helmand, where the Estonians work under a UK lead, the Defense Ministry is finalizing a second deployment of a HUMINT team. This second unit is expected to be collocated with American Marines,

also in RC-South. According to Harri Tiido, Estonia's Special Representative for AfPak, Estonia will "stick with" its current arrangements as part of the UK Task Force in Helmand. Tiido is waiting to see what comes of any reorganization of Regional Command-South (RC-South), and Estonian officials across the board make no secret of their desire to partner on a regular basis with U.S. forces.

¶4. (C) One intriguing new item on the Estonian agenda, coming as a result of President Obama's call for more Afghan security forces and more Afghan responsibility, is whether Estonia's own "Kaitseliit", or Defense League, might serve as a possible model for local/tribal/regional policing or defense arrangements in Afghanistan. The Kaitseliit is a voluntary national defense organization comprised of 15 provincial units, similar in many respects to the U.S. National Guard. In fact, Estonia's Defense League has a cooperative program with the Maryland National Guard. The Defense League, comprised of approximately 8,000 volunteers and an additional 9,000 members of auxiliary organizations, is regulated by the MOD, and its units possess arms and engage in military exercises. Tiido believes that the organization and modalities of the Kaitseliit could lend itself to similar local security arrangements in Afghanistan over time.

DEVELOPMENT: HEALTH CARE AND INTERNET FREEDOMS

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¶5. (U) As they keep their troop numbers as high as possible, Estonia is also looking to expand its civilian assistance, most likely in the health care field, where they are already well-established. Having turned over Bost Hospital in Helmand to Medecins Sans Frontieres, Estonia is looking at a number of small clinics across Helmand where they can provide assistance. As they reach out into rural areas, Tiido said it would be both necessary and desirable to make sure Estonian projects were coordinated and deconflicted with USAID and with U.S. forces. At the same time, according to Tiido, the Lithuanians have approached the Estonians about cooperating on health care projects in Ghor province (where Lithuania leads a PRT). Estonia has already invested in medical texts/information, translated in both Dari and Pushto, and they believe these materials could be useful in northern Afghanistan.

¶6. (U) Despite severe budget cuts in 2009, Estonia is making good on its commitment to invest approximately USD 1.85 million in Afghanistan from 2009-2011. The GOE has embarked on a diverse array of multi-year projects totaling USD 575,000 in 2009 to include hosting 15 Afghan diplomats at the Estonian School of Diplomacy in Tallinn. While Estonia's highest development priority remains health care and infrastructure development in support of security operations in Helmand, the GOE is also interested more broadly in economic development, legal sector reform and anti-corruption initiatives. Additionally, Estonia has a proposal for a project to assist the Afghan Parliament with IT infrastructure and training on parliamentary voting and procedures. Estonia has already successfully deployed similar projects in the Balkans and in Georgia. The Estonian Embassies in Washington and in Kabul are in touch with USAID to see whether the U.S. and Estonia can collaborate on this project. A parliamentary delegation, led by National Defense Committee Chairman Mati Raidma, will be in Kabul in late January, also to investigate how to move forward in supporting the Afghan Parliament.

¶7. (U) NOTE: In one area that brings a little wealth to Estonian coffers (welcome in this economically-repressed corner of Europe), Estonia was quick to support the transport of non-lethal material to Afghanistan via the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). With some of the best port facilities feeding into Russia, Estonia can support any increases in the flow of goods to Afghanistan via the

NDN.

DIPLOMACY: LONDON CONFERENCE & IMPROVING CIVILIAN COORDINATION

18. (C) Across the board, our Estonian interlocutors would like more consistency in civilian assistance efforts and an improvement in both military-civilian coordination and coordination among civilian aid agencies. Mati Raidma, who has significant disaster relief/military operations experience himself, contrasted the efficiency of military efforts with what he called a "very disorganized" civilian effort. Estonia would like UNAMA to take a greater role -- "the UN is the only actor with no agenda," Raidma commented. That said, he acknowledged that Estonia has no plans to increase support to UNAMA; rather, Estonia will increase by 50 percent its support for the EU Police Mission -- bringing the total number of Estonian police officers in Afghanistan to three.

19. (C) Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet will attend the London Conference. His point man on Afghanistan, Harri Tiido, called Estonia's expectations for London "modest." The meeting would be a success, he said, as long as it did not become a forum for

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countries to announce the withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan -- "there can be no running for the exits," he warned. Tiido welcomed the conference as a chance to reiterate that the importance of keeping to the 18-month window, but also to emphasize that troop withdrawals would be incremental, over-time and conditions-based. Raidma expressed a similar sentiment cautioning that it might not be realistic to achieve the results that would lead to departure in 18 months, but he does believe that real progress can be achieved in that time frame provided that the major challenges, such as improved cooperation among civilian aid agencies, are addressed. Other Estonian talking points for London should include:

-- Sustainability: Increasing the number of ANSF is necessary, but as we increase the size of the army and police, we need to make sure we have a plan for their use and a pay scale that can be sustained after international support ends.

-- Capacity building: Not buildings, but people -- and people outside of Kabul. Estonia wants to make sure its projects support strengthening the link between the central government and the provinces/districts.

--Reintegration fund: Estonia will make a "symbolic" contribution to the reintegration fund for former Taliban. Tiido confirmed that Estonia will provide some amount of money to the fund, but cautioned that it will not be large, as Estonian resources are small. But he agreed that the reintegration piece was crucial to future success, and Estonia would do as much as it could.

POLITICAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT REMAIN HIGH

10. (U) Official support for the Afghanistan mission remains high in Estonia. Neither the MFA bureaucracy nor the politicians in Parliament expect support to diminish in the near term. Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves has called publicly for troop commitments to be extended through the end of 2011. Several

high-level defense and security officials have echoed this sentiment, and Tiido is always on record that Estonia will remain in Afghanistan for as long as needed -- his catch-phrase in the media is "stay as long as we must, leave as soon as we can." Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo has reaffirmed that Estonia will not place any caveats or restrictions on where or how their troops will be deployed in Afghanistan.

¶11. (C) The Estonian public -- and its political representatives -- also remains supportive of the GOE's efforts in Afghanistan. Raidma told us that there has never been a debate, in parliament or in the public sphere, about the financial costs of Estonia's commitments in Afghanistan. The press will carry articles and place op-eds questioning the level of and reason for Estonia's participation in Afghanistan, but these articles gain little traction in public opinion. Raidma and Tiido both said they believed the public would continue to support the mission unless Estonia's casualty rate increased dramatically. So far, six Estonians have been killed in action, and while this is a high percentage per capita for Estonia, it does not cross the threshold of diminishing public support for Estonia's contributions in Afghanistan.

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COMMENT: NOT BIG, BUT RELEVANT

¶12. COMMENT: Estonia can never field the numbers of troops or provide the dollar amounts in assistance the way a "big country" can. Estonia does, however, bring political support that is rock-solid, and innovative development ideas that may be relevant in a way that some large-scale projects are not. Afghans can relate to Estonians -- the two countries share their resistance to their respective Soviet invasions -- and Estonia can offer valuable lessons to Afghanistan about building institutions from the ground up. Estonia's projects can have a real effect on real people, enhancing the Government of Afghanistan's authority -- all in the next 18 months. Continued U.S. support will be important. We will continue to work closely with the Estonian government and encourage Estonia to maintain a high op-tempo across the "Three Ds." We appreciate the assistance from Washington and Kabul colleagues -- especially in USAID -- to channel these Estonian resources effectively.  
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